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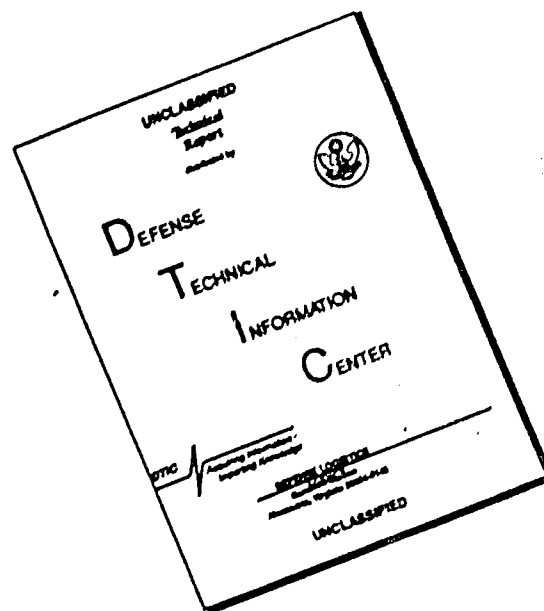
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AGAM-P (M) (17 June 69)

FOR OT-UT-69B013

24 June 1969

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: [REDACTED], [25th Infantry Division] CG, Capital Military Assistance Command, Period 30 July 1967 to 20 March 1969 (U) 18

10 F. K. Mearns

7 Apr 69

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1. Reference: AR 1-26, subject, Senior Officer Debriefing Program (U), dated 4 November 1966.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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AVHGC-DST

27 APR 1969

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report
MG F. K. MEARNS

Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development
Department of the Army
Washington, D.C. 20310

1. Attached are three copies of the Senior Officer Debriefing Report prepared by MG F. K. Mearns, Commanding General of the 25th Infantry Division and the Capital Military Assistance Command, for the period 30 July 1967 to 20 March 1969.
2. MG Mearns is recommended as a candidate guest speaker at appropriate service schools and joint colleges.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

C. D. WILSON
1LT, AGC
Assistant Adjutant General

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Country: Republic of Vietnam

Debrief Report by: F. K. Mearns, Major General, USA, 021106

Duty Assignments: Commanding General, 25th US Infantry Division
Commanding General, Capital Military Assistance Command

Inclusive Dates: 30 July 1967 - 13 April 1969

Date of Report: 09 APR 1969

1. (C) Causative factors of insurgency.

The causative factors of insurgency in SVN are painfully obvious if somewhat indirect. If you're a hungry Chinaman who has never heard of a vasectomy but who has confronted a burly Russian on the North, then you go South. Anyway, in the South the food is more plentiful and much more available. Beside that, it happens to fit the designs of the Mao Tse Tung experts in the political department.

The inherent nationalism of the Ho Chi Minh Communist cannot resist the threat of his Chinese political brother nor the attraction of that same brother's material support to a beleaguered, war-torn battered economy.

The Viet Minh didn't kill nearly 100,000 members of the French main-force without distressful cost to the small, rustic North Vietnamese viability. Even though ostensibly victorious against the French, the North Vietnamese needed help for the next round. They also, as North Vietnamese Communists, had imprinted upon their collective intellect that if the French were willing to pay such a bloody price and fail, the country which the French colonial system sought to retain must be worth a fight. And so it is--without question worth the fight--a veritable Garden of Eden; waiting to be plucked. Unfortunately the inhabitants of the South Vietnamese Garden are about as artful as Eve and, at the same time, as artless as Adam.

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Debrief Report by: F. K. Mearns, Major General, USA, 021106

This artful artlessness is the back drop for a favorable insurgency environment. It has been recognized as such by the Ho Chi Minh Communist and exploited. It has been equally recognized as a foible by the South Vietnamese patriot but he was, until the elections of September-October 1967, relatively powerless to muster a defense against insurgency. He has just now in this year of the Cock (c. AD 1969) begun to get himself organized.

There remain some basic tasks; to name a few: Vietnamese acceptance and practice of fundamental, democratic principles; replacement of a century old warlord and cumshaw system (grown under western economic plenty to unseemly corruption) by a legal taxation supported bureaucracy; land reform; and establishment of an adequate secondary public school system.

2. (C) Psychology of the insurgent.

The courage, fortitude and tenacity of the insurgent is remarkable. This mental outlook is a tribute to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong leadership. It is also a reflection of effective Fifth Column influences in the US and elsewhere in the Free World. Without question the enemy has exploited US public media attitudes and policies. The impact of our irresponsible public media would appear as the single, most telling influence of all in sustaining the enemy's will to win.

3. (S) Stability actions at province and autonomous city level.

a. My personal knowledge to any meaningful degree is limited to Saigon and the provinces of Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia, Binh Duong and Gia Dinh which, as a passing anomaly, translate respectively into Peaceful West, Divine Justice, Peaceful Dawn and Auspicious Calm.

(1) Tay Ninh is so strongly controlled by Cao Dai influence that the DTA commander (CG 25 ARVN Div) maintained only one cavalry troop as a token ARVN force within the province as a permanent garrison. During the Spring Offensive of 1968 it was notable that the III CTA commander conferred directly with the Cao Dai Pope prior to clearance of fires and ground troop maneuver in Tay Ninh City. Papal clearance was quickly granted, incidentally, to include destruction if necessary of the Holy See. There are other aspects in Tay Ninh. Though unable to document but based upon varied and persistent pieces of information I feel there are grounds to suspect:

(a) Large scale smuggling operations in and out of Cambodia with Highway 1 (vic Go Dau Ha) being the proximate axis.

(b) Significant traffic in timber concession payoffs applicable to the rich and accessible timber stands in Tay Ninh Province.

(c) Accommodation among Cao Dai Vietnamese, French interests and Viet

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Cong interests in regard to rubber plantation operations in Tay Ninh.

(d) Traffic for personal gain between members of Philippine Civic Action Group, Vietnam (Phil Cag V) and Viet Cong.

(2) Hau Nghia harbors the bed rock seat of National Liberation Front and Viet Cong resistance in III Corps TA. The Trang Bang - Phuoc My - Trung Lap - Bau Cap (center at XT 5722) quadrangle generally encompasses the hard core area. Vietnamese operations have been notable for their lack of determination and commitment of inadequate force into this VC heartland. In Hau Nghia, LTC Nhon, Province Chief, has been a controversial figure. (He was relieved in late March.) I personally think he is loyal to GVN interests. Some Vietnamese and some US people think otherwise. It is a matter of record that his administrative effectiveness is limited and that he has by and large ignored concentration of his attention and resources against the Trang Bang VC stronghold in his province. Nonetheless, LTC Nhon is an audaciously brave fighter.

(3) Binh Duong Province, in its more remote areas, has been a VC jungle stronghold. It has also been a nest of intrigue among French, Vietnamese and VC interests. The province falls within the DTA of 5th ARVN Division. Members of the Division staff have apparently had some ulterior commercial interests in upper Saigon River traffic. One honest province chief, Colonel Ba, was hired and fired in 1967-68. He was a thorn to the 5th ARVN Division. French interests, particularly those based on the Michelin holdings in Tri Tam District, have been suspect of collaboration with the VC and individuals in the 5th ARVN Division. Saigon River convoys between Phu Cuong and Dau Tieng under GVN protection have been noted en route to make "drop offs" in VC controlled areas. US soldiers have been attacked and killed by VC bandits in Tri Tam riding in Michelin Rubber Plantation vehicles. Unauthorized and unneeded rice rations have been made to plantation workers by local GVN officials. This occurred at a time when major effort was being made to deny rice to VC use. Until 1968 the Tri Tam District Chief, whose district encompassed the Michelin Plantation at Dau Tieng, was a brother-in-law of the G2 of the 5th ARVN Division. They were suspected of illegal collaboration with the French plantation manager, M. Buchard. The latter was observed by US eyes to have visually signalled VC forces of US operations as well as to make available to VC elements transportation and plantation houses including a hospital establishment. US DEPCORDS representatives, influenced by GVN officials, delayed for over a year US military efforts from effective reaction to this collaboration. US DEPCORDS officials were not disloyal. They were naive and did not want to rock the boat. These illicit operations were more than petty in their adverse effects on US interests. To this date they have had the effect of maintaining under VC control the vital logistical establishment along the Saigon River between Dau Tieng and the Iron Triangle.

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(4) Gia Dinh Province is a sensitive and complex area surrounding the Capital. It is the best managed and most honest, by and large, of the four provinces mentioned in this debrief.

(5) The autonomous city of Saigon shows more promise, albeit belatedly, of organizing itself and effectively coping with VC and other adverse interests than would have appeared probable one year ago. Fundamentally, the Thieu regime is the reason. The basic problems and constant threat of loss of clear cut control are by no means eliminated. To date, however, in this first year and a half of Thieu management, the GVN progress in Saigon has been impressive.

b. It appears fundamental that in order to solve underlying economic, socio-political issues the GVN must establish itself on a sound fiscal, tax supported basis. The great majority of government paid officials and employees receive inadequate remuneration to meet their survival needs. As a result, government employees engage in wide spread corrupt practices. It is difficult to condemn the individual when he is forced by economic necessity to enhance his income. (I am not making reference to big time operators who export funds to off shore accounts but to the rank and file bureaucrat.) Example: I have knowledge of a Vietnamese citizen who paid \$1200.00 (US) to a Vietnamese official for the privilege of exiting SVN on a 3 month visa to the US. Another example: US MP's operating on combined resource control points have reported repeatedly that GVN police routinely shake down individuals who desire to transit a control point. Many GVN officials are attempting to eliminate such practices. It appears doubtful, however, that necessary standards can be established until the economic necessity for corrupt practice is eliminated. This means the payment of a living wage to government employees including members of the armed forces. Under present circumstances this exceeds the financial capability of the government. Until this is done, it is apparent that the basic support of GVN by the body politic will not be spontaneous. In my opinion, it is primarily this fundamental factor which influences Vietnamese to support the NLF.

4. (C) GVN military forces.

a. Taking pertinent factors into balanced perspective, the military and para-military forces of GVN are developing favorably and at a rate which is encouraging. It is easy to see weakness and to criticize inadequacies. In all candor, however, when you visualize yourself realistically in the position of a Vietnamese private or of a general officer or in between, it is not easy to constructively criticize in a fundamental sense. The Vietnamese don't rotate after a year of service or after two or three. They rarely receive a hardship separation from service but they and their families experience plenty of hardship.

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The Vietnamese, like the Viet Cong and NVA, are brave and capable soldiers. They are also realists. Sometimes they do not appear overly aggressive. They are not afraid to die but they prefer to survive, particularly with sound limbs and faculties (permanent disability being often worse than dying). A Frenchman in Indo China "for the duration" during the Viet Minh War could understand the Vietnamese attitude more readily than many Americans.

Still, American knowledge, perseverance, cajolery, influence, threats and praise--not to mention economic support--have assisted the Vietnamese almost to a renaissance. It also has helped Vietnamese resurgence to have American forces destroy a rather significant number of the enemy.

The principle deficiency which characterizes Vietnamese military capability is in the logistical field. This is also the most difficult area to influence in a constructive sense. The logistical area is recognized by Vietnamese as an area closely monitored by US officials for corruption. As a result, the checks and counter checks before an issue can be made is nearly self defeating. The documents which a senior military commander must personally study and sign is unbelievable. Literally, I have seen routinely 2 to 3 feet of documents in the in-basket of field grade and general officers. These documents move every day. They must as a practical necessity because new ones keep coming every day. Without the commander's signature, however, they are invalid. (Unfortunately this same centralization applies to tactical decisions as well as logistical actions. A division commander does not fundamentally change a battalion mission without personal approval of his corps commander. A division commander must personally approve a fundamental mission change for one of his companies.) Sometimes the logistical intransigence seems overwhelming. There is progress, however; generally steady albeit slow.

5. (C) GVN Paramilitary Forces (CIDG)

On balance the Civilian Irregular Defense Group activities in III CTA have been of marginal effectiveness. It is highly probable that resources supporting this effort would be more productive if directed towards support of regular or territorial forces. In too many instances to be acceptable or unusual, the reliability of CIDG forces has been poor. Under the threat of impending enemy attack, literally hundreds out of a 1000 or 1200 man force have faded away before a shot was fired in earnest. This occurred at Prek Lok, Katum and Thien Nhon in Tay Ninh Province in 1967 and 1968. Many other similar occurrences have been reported. Mobile force units have been more effective than camp forces but mobile forces, too, have frequently proven unable to cope with situations which they encountered. As a result US forces have been committed to bail them out. These operations have usually

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Debrief Report by: F. K. Mearns, Major General, USA, 021106

proven non-productive in damage to the enemy in comparison to the use of these same US assets had they been committed on other operations.

Information reported by CIDG has proven unreliable in more cases than that from other sources of the same rated degree of reliability. There is reason to believe that CIDG patrols are inclined to operate in the same pattern on a repetitious routine well known to the enemy and, therefore, easily avoided by him. Still, these patrols report "hot information" which generally proves over rated in reliability.

Depredations by CIDG members on innocent civilians are fairly common place. Many Vietnamese ask why the VC are any worse than marauding CIDG personnel.

Vietnamese Special Force officers in too many cases have proven incompetent or dishonest. Many US Special Forces personnel have discussed this and expressed their concern as well as their inability to do much, if anything, about it.

Basically there appears no reason why the CIDG should be expected to be a reliable or effective force. They are poorly paid mercenaries who lack for the most part the one compelling motivation, namely patriotism, which is essential for a para-military force of this type.

Generalization, when critical, is always unfair to those who are exceptions to the rule. There, unquestionably, are good CIDG units, fine leaders, and outstanding individuals in the organization. My adverse opinion is based on what I have observed and represents my candid conclusion.

6. (C) US Forces.

a. Army aviation:

Air crew personnel--officer and enlisted--have exhibited an extremely high level of dedication and courage. It is more difficult to evaluate aviation support people but my impression is of notable dedication on their part also. It is true that aviation personnel are generally more carefully selected than other categories and more thoroughly trained so one expects good results. Nonetheless, their performance has made the air mobile concept and other aviation applications a decisive measure of US success in Vietnam.

b. Combat arms:

It has been said frequently that we have fielded in SVN the best trained force in our history. This is a good thing because what we enjoy in sound

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training we lack in experience. There is a dangerously thin margin of meaningful control at the company level. The company commander and a small nucleus of seasoned non-coms constitute the margin in most cases. When the company commander and the first sergeant become casualties at the same time, this is a danger signal. Special effort must be taken promptly to assure continued effectiveness of the unit.

The infantry battalion commander is under the gun. He is invariably a high quality officer with insufficient troop experience to do his job upon arrival in country. Because he is a promising officer, he has been serving in various non-troop capacities for the bulk of his service subsequent to company grade. He has in few cases been given meaningful training and experience sufficient to qualify him to jump into his LOH 6 and start commanding his battalion upon arrival in SVN. His first 6 weeks are critical. This is his learning period and it has, on occasion, been tough on the troops not to mention himself. Knowing the theory and reading about air mobile and other routine operations in Vietnam are very different from realistic battalion command training and experience.

The light artillery battalion commander is even more under the gun than his infantry brother. The coordination and control of fires, especially in populated areas, is a monster. If you shoot too fast and make a mistake it is a catastrophe. If you shoot too unresponsively it can be a tactical defeat. Either way it is life and death. The short refresher course at Fort Sill has been very helpful. Still you can't eliminate a problem of this nature by training, no matter how well conceived and conducted. It simply is a difficult problem.

c. Administration:

Supply, maintenance, evacuation, medical support and administrative operations have been highly effective. Engineer vertical construction, however, has been a persistent problem. Apparently Engineer troop construction capability is limited. Aside from limitations of the vertical capability, the preliminary procedures which characterize construction projects under USACAV authority are cumbersome, time consuming and unduly costly. I make this statement based upon comparison to USAID projects and believe that close examination will substantiate my view.

F. K. MEARNS
Major General, USA
Commanding

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